

## Assistance and Support Organizations

*Facing the death of a loved one is an exhausting and seemingly overwhelming experience. However, support does exist through the advocacy of various survivor assistance organizations.*

### Highmark Caring Place

The Highmark Caring Place provides support to children and families who have experienced the death of a loved one. Highmark Caring Place is a community resource that provides encouragement and a safe place for children, adolescents, and their families to heal and grow. Services are offered at no cost. [www.highmarkcaringplace.com](http://www.highmarkcaringplace.com)



620 Stanwix Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
1-888-224-4673

### Center for Victims

The Center for Victims offers support to all who have been affected by a crime from the moment the crime occurs, through duration of the legal process, and during the physical and emotional healing process. The 24-Hour Crisis Hotline provided by the Center for Victims can be contacted at 1-866-644-2882. [www.centerforvictims.org](http://www.centerforvictims.org)



Pittsburgh Office  
5916 Penn Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
412-482-3240

### Cribs for Kids

Cribs for Kids National Infant Sleep Initiative aims to prevent infant death by educating parents and caregivers on the importance of practicing safe sleep for their babies. Cribs for Kids also provides support and educational resources for parents and families who have experienced the loss of an infant. [www.cribsforkids.org](http://www.cribsforkids.org)



5450 Second Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15207  
1-888-721-CRIB

### Vision Towards Peace

Vision Towards Peace is a counseling service that aims to help with the healing process for those in need. The culturally sensitive atmosphere of Vision Towards Peace provides therapy in areas including, but not limited to, addiction, grief, mental health, addiction, depression and stress. [www.visiontowardspeace.com](http://www.visiontowardspeace.com)



711 Penn Avenue  
Floor 2  
Wilkinsburg, PA 15221  
412-241-4673

### The Compassionate Friends

The Compassionate Friends vision is to offer support, understanding, friendship, hope, and comfort to families who are going through the grieving process after the death a child. [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)  
[www.tcfpittsburgh.org](http://www.tcfpittsburgh.org)



Pittsburgh Chapter  
P.O. Box 15495  
Pittsburgh, PA 15237  
412-835-1105

National Office  
630-990-0010 or toll-free  
877-969-0010

### Good Grief Center

As a part of the Ursuline Support Services, the Good Grief Center for Bereavement Support is dedicated to providing bereavement education, resources, support, and hope. For all ages, the Good Grief Center is a safe place for those who have experienced death to come and work through the loss and learn to manage grief. [www.ursulinesupportservices.org/services/good-grief-center](http://www.ursulinesupportservices.org/services/good-grief-center)



2717 Murray Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412-224-4700

### National Archives or U.S Department of Veterans Affairs

The National Archives and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are resources the next of kin of a deceased Veteran can utilize to request military records for the purpose of determining if the decedent is eligible for a Veteran's Burial.



Customer Service  
Phone: 314-801-0800  
Fax: 314-801-0764  
[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)



Customer Service  
Phone: 1-800-827-1000  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

### Allegheny County Veteran's Affairs

Phone: 412-621-4357

<https://www.alleghenycounty.us/veterans/county-benefits.aspx>

### Tree of Hope

Tree of Hope offers healing, hope, and support to families who have experienced traumatic losses. As a non-profit organization, Tree of Hope has a special focus on children who have been left behind after losing a parent. [www.treeofhope.com](http://www.treeofhope.com)



250 North Highland Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
412-361-6400  
Hotline: 1-800-804-8410

# Survivors' Guide

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## Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner

1520 Penn Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Phone: 412-350-4800  
Fax: 412-350-4899

Medical Examiner  
Karl E. Williams, M.D., M.P.H.

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*The Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner extends its deepest sympathy during this difficult time. It is our hope that the information contained in this Survivors' Guide will assist your decision making and provide helpful solutions during this time of loss.*

### **Medical Examiner's Jurisdiction**

The Medical Examiner is mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to investigate and determine the manner and cause of death. These include cases of homicide, suicide, accidental, and all natural deaths that are sudden, unexpected, or medically unattended. Accordingly, the manner and cause of death are determined by means of investigation, toxicology, and an extensive post mortem examination (autopsy), at which time a death certificate is generated in accordance with the medical findings.

The post mortem examination (autopsy) is vital in the determination of a definitive manner and cause of death. The final autopsy decision is made by the Forensic Pathologist. Autopsy objections from the next of kin are considered only after an autopsy waiver is signed. Please be advised that the autopsy waiver in itself does not preclude the autopsy. Without this critical and often necessary procedure, it is more difficult for the Office of the Medical Examiner to accurately determine a manner and cause of death.

### **Disposition of Remains**

The Office of the Medical Examiner is located at 1520 Penn Avenue, at the corner of 16<sup>th</sup> and Penn in the Strip District. If a positive identification is necessary, an Investigator will notify the next of kin in conjunction with the police department, at which time the procedure will be explained regarding identification of the decedent. The Medical Examiner's Office will provide viewing of the deceased only in cases where a positive identification is absolutely necessary. The office is not designed as a viewing facility.

### **Release of Decedent & Personal Effects**

At the earliest convenience, it is advised that the legal next of kin select a funeral home and inform the funeral director that the death is under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner's Office. Generally, the release of the decedent should not take more than 24 hours. The funeral director will coordinate the release on your behalf.

The Office of the Medical Examiner does not select, recommend, or make funeral arrangements. In the event someone is making funeral arrangements for the family, the Medical Examiner must be provided with written authorization to release the deceased.

Personal possessions in the custody of the Medical Examiner may be claimed by the legal next of kin. To avoid any inconvenience, call the office and schedule an appointment. Photo identification is required prior to the release of personal effects.

Unless there is a need to hold clothing as evidence, it is released to the funeral director recovering the deceased. Clothing that presents a health hazard may be disposed of for the safety of all persons involved.

### **Death Certificate Availability**

Once the determination is made regarding the cause and manner of death, the Office of the Medical Examiner generates a death certificate. Following the burial, the original death certificate is filed with the Pennsylvania Department of Vital Records by the funeral director. Should certified copies be required, they can be obtained through the Department of Vital Records.

#### **Send to:**

Division of Vital Records  
411 Seventh Avenue, Suite 360  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

### **Autopsy Report Availability**

Final autopsy reports are available for release to only the legal next of kin. The Office of the Medical Examiner requires written authorization from the next of kin prior to the release of all autopsy reports. Inquires made in writing should include:

- Name of the deceased
- Date of Death
- Relationship to deceased
- Return address and phone number

#### **Send to:**

Allegheny County Medical Examiner's Office  
1520 Penn Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

There is no charge for the initial copy of the final autopsy report. Please allow at least twelve weeks for delivery from the date of death. **If the case is pending due to laboratory or investigative studies, it may take additional weeks or months from the date of death to finalize the cause and manner of death.**

### **Organ Donation**

Although facing the death of a loved one is overwhelming, a decision regarding organ donation may present the opportunity to save lives. Once it is determined that your loved one has no medical condition that would medically preclude the organ donation, a representative from the Center of Organ Recovery and Education (C.O.R.E.) will advise and discuss your options. The organ donation procedure will not be performed without the authorization of both the next of kin and the Office of the Medical Examiner.

C.O.R.E.- Pittsburgh, PA 1-800-DONORS-7 (1-800-367-6777)

### **Non-Availability of Funds for Burial**

In the event the deceased or the legal next of kin does not have sufficient funds for burial, the organizations listed below may provide assistance and recommendations regarding interment. Allegheny County does not provide an indigent burial program. If all efforts to locate and notify next of kin have been exhausted, the Office of the Medical Examiner will provide disposition of the body after 15 days.

- Catholic Charities/St. Vincent DePaul Pittsburgh, PA- (412) 321-1071
- Jewish Cemetery & Burial Association of Greater Pittsburgh- (412) 554-6460 or (412) 421-9477
- Allegheny County Veterans Services- Pittsburgh, PA- (412) 621-4357